Rescue of Castro Foes In Haiti Disclosed Here

By JEREMIAH O'LEARY 4/28/67
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A Cuban exile leader recently flew to Haiti on a mercy mission that resulted in the 11th-hour rescue of five anti-Castro agents from one of dictator Francois Duvalier's firing squads.

Ernesto Freyre, a former Havana lawyer and now one of the leaders of RECCE, a Miami-based exile organization, told the story today during a visit to Washington.

Freyre said the narrow escape came after the five exiles had set out from a secret Caribbean base in a small boat on one of the frequent missions RECCE plans to get agents in and out of Cuba. The missions primarily seek to gather information about the state of affairs in Fidel Castro's Cuba or to bring out key individuals in the undeclared war between the exiles and the Cuban Communist government.

Swept Astray

The small boat was swept far to the east of its intended landfall in Oriente province and the five-man crew was forced to go ashore somewhere on the coast of Haiti, the Caribbean's other repressive dictatorship.

Freyre said his five men had no designs on the Duvalier regime but that militiamen quickly arrested them under the impression that they were part of the rightist exile organization of Rolando Masferrer. The Haitians were still nervous about Masferrer's abortive attempt to mount an expedition of Cuban and Haitian exiles against Duvalier with the announced aim of toppling the Port au Prince regime and then using Haiti as a base for attacks against Castro.

Freyre said he was in Miami when he heard that his five men were in Haitian custody and was shocked at the news that they were sentenced to death by the Duvalier government. Freyre, whose son was a member of the Bay of Pigs expedition in 1961, immediately flew to Port au Prince and sought an audience with Duvalier.

Duvalier received Freyre in the National Palace that serves as his seat of government, arsenal and jail and, according to the exile leader, sat talking with him nearly all night.

The 60-year-old Haitian president-for-life was armed with two .45 caliber revolvers and wore a military uniform during the entire discussion. This is considered significant by outside observers since Duvalier, so far as is known, has never been seen in anything but civilian clothes.

Freyre said he made as eloquent a plea as he could for the lives of the five RECCE agents, insisting repeatedly that their organization has nothing to do with Masferrer and that it has no designs on Haiti.

With U.S. Help

After seven hours of conversation with Duvalier, Freyre said, Duvalier announced that he believed the RECCE leader's story. Duvalier then called in an aide. In a matter of minutes, the five prisoners were brought in and Duvalier told Freyre they were free to go.

Freyre said he was able with the assistance of U.S. authorities to take the five back to Miami.

Masferrer, late last year, made what appeared to be an attempt to send a small expeditionary force from southern Florida against Haiti but U.S. customs agents moved in, seized members of the force, their boat and their arms.